

Consumer Information and Procedures

-- Smart Shoppers' Guide to Using Phones Away From Home

When you use a telephone away from your home, be aware that you can choose which telephone company you would like to handle your call. Many telephone users are surprised at the large amount charged by the telephone company which provided service. To avoid that situation, remember that rates differ from company to company. With the following information, you will be better equipped to learn what the rates are and to decide which company to use.

The two types of phones you use away from home are:

1. **Coin-Operated Pay Phones:** Telephones available to the general public, such as those in restaurants, airports, shopping centers, and hotel lobbies, are commonly referred to as "pay telephones."
2. **Private Room Phones:** These telephones are in private rooms such as those you use in hotel rooms, hospital rooms, or university dorm rooms.

What You Should Know Before Making a Call:

The individual or business that owns the telephone preselects a telephone company to provide telephone service. But you can access another company's service by using that company's access code, a sequence of numbers that connects you with that phone company. Once you access that service, you can make: a credit card call, a collect call, an operator-assisted person-to-person call, or a third-party billed call. These are all operator-assisted calls, either through live or automated operators. The company that handles your call -- either the preselected phone company (if you dial "0") or the company you access (if you dial the access code) -- is referred to as the Operator Service Provider.

- You may obtain the preselected telephone company's rate information by dialing "0."
- You may obtain another phone company's rate information by calling the company's direct phone number or the company's access code.
- Rate information includes a rate for each minute of use as well as a surcharge for the type of call that is made.

Options Available To You When You Make the Call:

1. Use the Operator Service Provider that was preselected to serve that telephone.
 - Insert coins in a coin-operated phone, dial the phone number on a private room phone, or use operator assistance to complete the call.
 - On or near the phone the telephone owner should post the name, address, and toll-free number of the company that serves the phone.
 - By dialing "0," you can request that company's rates or charges and how the company will collect the charges.

(Note: If you ask the operator to place your call, you may be charged an additional fee.)

2. Use another telephone company.
 - You must dial the appropriate access code (10XXX, 1-800) in order to use another telephone company.
 - You must contact the company for an access code (if you do not already know it) and rate information.
 - If you use a credit card number without dialing the access code, you may be billed by the company that serves that telephone -- not by your own telephone company.

(Note: When possible, determine the telephone company of your choice and its access code before using the phone.)

After You Have Placed an Operator-Assisted Call:

- The phone company is allowed to bill you within one year after you have placed the call.
- The telephone company's name or its billing agent's name will appear on the bill.
- If you are overcharged, the telephone company which provided your phone service will refund the overcharge upon request.
- If you have paid for any uncompleted calls, the telephone company that provided your phone service will refund the money upon request.
- If your bill is found to be incorrect, the telephone company will pay your refund with interest from the date you paid the bill (interest rates are determined by the Commission).

What You Can Do If You Feel You Have Been Overcharged:

- You have been overcharged only if you are billed at a higher rate than that stated by the operator or if you were billed more than the maximum rate established by the Commission. (Note: You are responsible for requesting the rate information from the phone company.)
- If you have been overcharged, call the phone company or its billing agent identified on your bill.
- If you are not satisfied with the response, send a copy of your bill and a letter explaining your position to the Illinois Commerce Commission's Consumer Services Division for an investigation.